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JUL 31 1950

My dear Mr. Secretary:

This refers to your letter to me of July 29, 1950 forwarding the recommendations of the Joint Chiefs of Staff on the subject of Chinese Nationalist military action against Chinese Communist amphibious concentrations along the east China Coast.

I believe that the issues presented by the recommendations of the Joint Chiefs of Staff are of the greatest seriousness and should be discussed by us jointly with the President at the earliest opportunity.

The decision to use the Seventh Fleet to neutralize Formosa militarily in the present crisis was based upon the considerations set forth by the President in his statement of June 27 and in his message to Congress of July 19. We have presented these considerations to a number of other governments in an effort to obtain a measure of international support for a step which had no United Nations sanction and which involves issues on which the governments of the free world have sharply divergent views.

If the Department of Defense and the Joint Chiefs of Staff now consider that their presently available resources are inadequate to carry out their directive concerning Formosa, that conclusion is of the gravest importance and should be brought to the President's attention immediately. When the Department of Defense and the Joint Chiefs of Staff concurred in the decision made by the President regarding Formosa on June 26 (announced on June 27), it was presumably accepted on the basis that the mission could be carried out by the Seventh Fleet as envisaged in the President's statements. If that is not now our capability, it seems to me that we must consider the following principal alternative lines of action:

a. To

The Honorable
Louis Johnson,
The Secretary of Defense.

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a. To reinforce the Seventh Fleet as rapidly as possible to permit it to carry out its mission;

b. To recognize and accept the risk of not being able to guarantee a successful result, with the possibility that Chinese forces on the mainland might not attack or that such an attack might be successfully met by available U. S. Naval and Chinese Nationalist forces;

c. To find a suitable way to relieve ourselves of a military commitment which is considered to be beyond our present capabilities.

I am not now urging a choice among these alternatives until we shall have considered the matter together; from a foreign policy point of view, however, the first alternative is by far the most desirable.

With regard to mining operations, it would seem to be clearly within existing policy for the Chinese to mine areas essential to the defense of Nationalist-held islands off the coast of China and for United States and Chinese forces to mine areas off Formosa or the Pescadores. The usual precautions such as notification to international shipping would have to be considered.

The launching of preventive bombing attacks by either U. S. or Chinese Nationalist forces against the mainland or against concentrations in mainland territorial waters, however, would have most serious results and would be unacceptable from a foreign policy point of view. Some of the more important factors are the following:

a. Whether preventive attacks are made against the Chinese mainland by U. S. forces or by Chinese Nationalist forces acting under the umbrella of U. S. naval protection, the international political responsibility of the United States would be the same.

b. We are not at war with Communist China nor do we wish to become involved in hostilities with Chinese Communist forces. Our commitments may already be greater than our present capabilities; the action recommended would extend our involvement.

c. We

c. We now face a risk of hostilities between Formosa and the mainland; the action recommended would convert the risk into a certainty by our own decision. The G-2 Periodic Intelligence Report on Soviet Intentions and Activities No. 4, dated July 27, 1950 states "There is no reliable information that an attack on Taiwan is imminent." We understand that reconnaissance thus far has not confirmed reports on unusual concentrations of junks referred to in current intelligence estimates, although it is conceded that reconnaissance has been inadequate as a basis for firm conclusions on this point.

d. The action recommended would place us in a minority of almost one if the matter were brought before the United Nations Security Council and we should be confronted by a major diplomatic problem in our relations with friendly governments.

e. If we or the Chinese Nationalists should now precipitate hostilities between Formosa and the mainland, the probability of Chinese Communist overt intervention with armed forces in Korea or attack on Indochina would be greatly increased. The military advantage of preventive attacks by the Chinese Nationalists against the mainland would have to be weighed, from a United States point of view, against Chinese Communist intervention in Korea or Indochina.

f. Other Members of the United Nations contributing forces for Korea would be under great pressure to withdraw such support if Chinese intervention were afforded a pretext by action taken by us with respect to Formosa.

g. The capabilities of the Chinese Nationalist Air Force to achieve a serious military effect through the proposed action has not been set forth. It would be useful to consider whether we should elect major political and possibly military difficulties in exchange for minor military effect. Presumably if the Chinese Nationalist Air Force had adequate capabilities these would have been revealed at the time of the attack on Hainan or during their operations against the mainland prior to June 27 unless it be true that the Chinese Communists have recently presented much more vulnerable targets.

h. The

h. The ability of the free world to resist aggression depends upon moral and psychological as well as upon military factors. If the enemy is clearly and unequivocally branded by our own and world public opinion as the aggressor, the political and military advantages are obvious. Similarly, it seems to me that we should take considerable military risks rather than place ourselves in the role of an aggressor by launching an attack on our own initiative, unless there are overwhelming considerations of national security involved.

There are other elements in the problem which need not be set forth at this juncture. I should greatly appreciate it if you could let me know when you are ready to discuss this matter with the President. Perhaps it would be useful if you and I should go over it further between ourselves before seeing the President, but I recognize the urgency.

Sincerely yours,

DEAN ACHESON

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